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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 000069

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STATE FOR DCHA JBRAUSE, SREICHLE; OFDA FOR CCHAN, ACONVERY, RANDREW,
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BUDAPEST FOR USAID/OFDA JACK MYER

TAGS: [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PO](#)
SUBJECT: PORTUGAL FLOOD DISASTER DECLARATION

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¶1. This is an action request - please see Paragraph 7.

SUMMARY

¶2. More than a normal month's worth of rain fell within eight hours on February 20, in Funchal, the capital of Madeira, a Portuguese island 1,200 kilometers southwest of Lisbon, causing flash floods and mudslides that killed at least 43 people, injured more than 120, and left hundreds homeless. Hundreds more are still missing.

Rescue workers worked through the night clearing rocks, trees, and mud in Funchal and other coastal communities. Assistance will be needed in the coming days to restore basic services, including potable water and electric power, and in rebuilding roads. Though the full extent of the damage will not be known for some time, the situation is beyond the GOP's capacity to manage. The government has declared an emergency situation and requested international assistance. It is in the USG interest to provide assistance. Post requests USG international disaster resources. END SUMMARY.

¶3. Although the rains have abated, the U.S. Consular Agent in Funchal reports that the streets are impassable, either filled with mud or several feet of debris. In some cases, the tops of cars are barely visible above the rocks. Major shopping centers were totally destroyed, with six feet of water filling the lowest floors, and two or three levels of underground parking completely filled with water.

Many businesses were totally wiped out. The high death toll has forced authorities to use the international airport as a temporary mortuary. Emergency teams are working on re-establishing electricity and water supply. Phone lines have been down; emergency services have had to send calls out for off-duty doctors and nurses to report for work via the radio.

¶4. A growing number of families forced from their homes by the floods are being sheltered at army barracks and other locations, and are receiving some assistance from NGOs and local authorities. Many lost all their possessions and endured traumatic escapes.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

¶5. Portuguese authorities rushed aid beginning February 20, dispatching a Navy frigate and preparing a C-130 transport plane loaded with rescue teams, divers, and equipment to clear blocked roads, replace destroyed bridges, and repair downed power and telephone lines. Prime Minister Jose Socrates and Interior Minister Rui Pereira flew to Funchal to meet with regional government officials, pledging the central government's full support. On February 22, following a special Cabinet meeting to discuss the situation in Funchal, Socrates announced three days of national mourning for the victims and pledged to work closely with the Madeiran government to assess the damages and to request EU funds to address the situation. Local authorities announced that a request to ask for EU funds to face the material losses caused by the storm would soon be submitted. European Commission President Jose Durao

Barroso, who hails from Portugal, announced February 21 that the EU stood ready to provide assistance.

¶6. Madeira is a small community and the U.S. Consular Agent, who has surveyed the organizations on the ground, advises that Caritas Diocesana, a Catholic relief services NGO, is currently helping the hundreds of people displaced by the flooding and landslides. According to the Consular Agent, Caritas is linked to the diocese network on the island, has the confidence of the residents, and is the only NGO that has the necessary infrastructure already in place.

He believes Caritas is best placed to utilize short term international donations. Post believes that it would be in the best interests of the USG to provide assistance through this disaster declaration to this organization. Specifically, Post requests \$50,000 for Caritas to purchase food, clothing, blankets, and other necessities for the hundreds of homeless people currently living in army barracks.

DISASTER DECLARATION

¶7. Due to the humanitarian effects of the flooding and resulting landslides in Madeira, Embassy Lisbon declares that a disaster exists and that it is in the interests of the USG to provide humanitarian assistance. The GOP has requested international assistance and the situation is beyond its capacity to manage. USAID/OFDA is requested to make available \$50,000 to U.S. Embassy Lisbon for support to Madeira as described above.

¶8. Post will continue to track the situation and stay in close contact with OFDA through post's Mission Disaster Relief Officer, Deputy Polcouns Mario Fernandez, as the situation evolves and any other needs emerge.

For more reporting from Embassy Lisbon and information about Portugal, please see our Intelink site:

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http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/portal:port_ugal

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